

You used to share. If you had a friend, say they didn't like eggs, you'd give them tea and they'd give you their eggs or vice versa. Or you'd buy them off them. I knew a girl worked at a tea factory so we used to get tea alright, see? I used to pay her rent for her! She used to go to work in the daytime and couldn't pay her rent, so I'd do it for her. Then when she come out, she'd give me the tea. That's how we worked it.

Flo Ball

My father worked at the Times and the News of the World. He could fetch home white paper that hadn't been printed on. My father used to come back on the Sunday morning and take the paper round to Edwards, 'cause they couldn't get it. It was all cut in squares, it was marvellous. So every now and again my dad got a leg of lamb for that.

Ivy Richardson

We were close to the docks, and we always considered this to be the larder of London, so you had a hell of a lot of dockers working in and out of there, and they weren't all choir boys by any means! And many a case has been dropped, and you know, "Sorry about that, it slipped!" And so there was a little source of supply coming through there, which was kept very quiet!

Bill Gibson

We were lucky because when we were in Yorkshire, near to us was this farm. Their daughters were all that bit older so they wanted clothes but they didn't have the coupons. My mother having four children couldn't afford to spend all her coupons, she hadn't got the money to spend so we had coupons to spare. What we used to do was, we gave the people clothing coupons and from the farm they used to give us back butter which they'd made and stuff. When

they went and bought material and they had made their clothes, whatever bits they had left they made into dresses for us.

Doris Stevenson

We did get our wedding cake made, because we knew somebody who made a lovely fruit cake for us, and almonds I think. But there was no icing sugar, so we had a cardboard covering. Everyone did! With all little bits and pieces on it. And it looked so real that when we were going to cut the wedding cake, everyone went "Aaaah..."

Grace Smith-Grogue

I used to send the children round for sausages. I used to get however many they would allow you. Sometimes you'd get a pound, sometimes you'd only get about six. Once I sent my two, and my eldest one got his and the other one was only about five and she said to him, "I've just served your brother," so he didn't get any and he came home crying. She knew it was him. I was trying to work the oracle, trying to get two lots.

Mrs Bennett

It was word of mouth. They would come along and say, "Mrs that, her daughter works at so-and-so's - she can get you bacon." If you had the money to pay, then you'd tell Mrs so-and-so who then told Mrs so-and-so and the bacon would come down the trail. If you had the money I think you probably could get most things, if you could afford to get it. Of course a lot of people couldn't, so they didn't.

Doris Stevenson

You had to get fuel where you could. There was a place down by Rotherhithe Tunnel - a gasworks - where you could get the coke. Then of course you had to have something - push chairs or whatever

you could get - to wheel it home, because it was about a mile away. Then there was a little shop where coal used to be delivered from time to time. And the message would go round - "Maggie's got coal! Take the push chair round!" And so we'd get in the queue and we'd get our bag of coal. And it was thick snow, and of course the stuff we had on the push-chair far outweighed what the push-chair could take, and pushing it across the snow didn't help! So there we were with the wheels gradually going out like this! And we ended up by dispensing with the push-chair, and pulling the coal along in the sack on our way home, sliding it along the ground. And if there was bomb damage anywhere and there were beams, wood, or whatever, you'd get the push-chair round there, and load the beams on there, and then bring it home and saw it all up.

Lil Patrick

I worked at Crosse and Blackwell's on baked beans. I used to label them. If we got one and it was bent, had something wrong with it, we used to put that in a certain place and it would be sold in our shop, the factory shop. People who worked at Crosse and Blackwell's could buy stuff in there cheap, like a tin of salmon you could get for six pence a tin. You got them cheap because they couldn't sell them. Some of them they did sell actually. There was a man who used to be in a little shop in the Old Kent Road. He'd buy a lot of damaged stock, jam from Hartley's, beans from Crosse and Blackwell's, and sell them cheap.

Flo Ball

One day this old boy turns up with a big shoebox full of clothing coupons. So he said, "Want these?" for a tanner each or something, so I said, "Alright, I'll have them." So I did, we were all fiddling you

know. And anyway, I gave some to an aunt of mine, who was a very well respected lady, and she used to shop in very expensive shops like Jones and Higgins, beautiful shops in those days, with the floor walker and morning dress and everything. And she phoned me one day, and she said, "Oh, could you come and see me," she said, "I've bought some curtains" or something, she said, "and he says they're not real coupons at all." Oh Christ, I thought. I said, "Well, just tell her, look just tell her that somebody borrowed some coupons from her, when they were short of coupons, to get something, and when he had to pay her back, he'd paid her back with coupons and they were the coupons he'd paid her. But he was in the airforce and he's gone to sea now and he's gone somewhere." So you know, they didn't worry. It went on all the time.

Joe Scala

They were very nice dresses. You'd have one colour for the bodice and the sleeves would be a different colour and the collar was different. Not all patchwork - the two sleeves matched in colour but were a different colour, the pockets were a different colour. We used to have all these creations left from the adult clothes made into clothes for us. We used to have skirts - one bit was skirt and the top was made like a blouse. If it didn't meet for the blouse, they'd let in another bit so it looked as if you had a strap. Beautifully done.

Doris Stevenson

When the parachutes used to come down, they used to crash, my friend and I used to go and buy the parachutes silk and make our clothes out of them. My friend made her bridal outfit out of that.

Emily Lane

The Yanks would bring stockings but I didn't know any Yanks. You were lucky to know somebody who knew somebody, sort of thing. I had a couple of pairs of stockings from America, I think. My husband would forage round.

Mrs Bennett

We can't survive without a cup of tea, you know. I suppose it's like the French with wine. The first thing we do when we've got a problem is to get the kettle on, so the amount of tea that was allocated to us was obviously insufficient. And

this is how it was done: people you knew, friends, would say, "I can get my hands on some tea if you want!" I can't remember the prices now, but it was always twice as much. And that was obviously stolen from somewhere, wasn't it? I mean it had to be, didn't it, when you stopped to think about it. But you know, the moral side of it, when you're gasping for a cup of tea, you kind of put that in the grey area don't you, and think, "No that wasn't me - I didn't do that!", but we did. We all did it.

Lil Patrick



The National Emergency Washing Service provided a mobile launderette for the waterless residents of East Surrey Grove in May 1943.

WORK IN WAR

I worked for a firm in Abbey Street. When the raids started, we used to do the bomb damage. When all the windows got blown out we would put the black stuff up to stop the light coming in the window. You'd see a roof smashed right in. Just repaired it and a week later it got all blown up again.

Many times there was a raid while you were working. You took no notice of it. Everybody got used to bombing and it never worried people that much.

Joe French

At the start of the war I was working in Surrey Docks as a deal porter. Surrey Commercial Docks was huge. All ships used to come in from Russia, Finland and Sweden with timber. I never believed that Surrey Commercial Dock would close for timber. Then they bombed the docks in 1940 and there was a vast fire. They never opened any more really. Not for deal portering. Well, you had to earn a living. I was married and had got a child. I'd got to earn money. So I went to the Labour Exchange and they sent me to Guildford building tank traps.

Leonard Whitlock

It was a case of - you went into the forces or you did munitions work. I went and was trained as an engineer. An engineer takes seven years to train, doesn't he? I was given three months.

You worked seventy hours a week, from seven at night till seven in the morning. I must tell you - I was quite good at this lathe, doing a two star thread - very nerve racking. Not a lot of people

could do it. It was for the tail pins of the aeroplanes to turn doubly quick. You dealt in millimetres I think - thousandths. You used to go in and the lathe would turn. Now you had to pull it out to go back, but you had to remember where you went in. You had to know how far out you'd pulled it, 'cause if you didn't pull it out far enough you'd take your screw right off straight away. You had a wheel here and you would drop in your tool, bring it out, go back, put it in a thousandth or whatever you wanted to take off again, wait till the wheel come round to six and drop in again. I was the head girl at that factory.

Grace Shelford

In the Town Hall there were lots of people. But later on it was mainly girls, because the men were called up. But when I worked there to begin with, there were three girls and two hundred boys, so you can imagine...! And they were called up, and so you had the girls from the libraries that were closed down during the war - you see, Dulwich Library was bombed, so the girls from there had to come to the Town Hall.

My friend and I volunteered to begin with, to join the Land Army. After all, the boys had been sent off, it wasn't the same in the Town Hall, so we thought we'd join up. But the council said no; they wouldn't release us to join up. And then later we decided we'd try for nursing, and they said, "Yes, you can join up as long as you don't train," because they got the feeling that we wouldn't come back if we trained. It was a bit silly really.

Because my husband was invalided out of the forces, I was released. I only had to do a part-time

job - you know, you were directed, during the war. So I got a part-time job in the library and I thought this was fine, but the local Council said, "You haven't been directed to this job. You have no right to get a job on your own!" So they directed me to a builders' office, doing the book-keeping.

Edna Davis

Well I was called up. They said that I had to go in the forces, because I had no children. So I said, "Oh, I don't want to go into the forces", as I had a husband. So they said, "Well, then you must get a job doing war work." So I went and made Anderson shelters. Well I stuck that for a little while, then I thought, well this is not for me, it's too heavy! So I applied to be a tram conductress, but I don't know whether that was worse - I suppose it was - but I did have a nice driver; he used to meet me at four o'clock in the morning, you know. I had to get on the tram then. We had no training, but you did anything you had to.

Milly Jackson

At sixteen, I worked in the motive power department at Plaistow on the railway engines, the big steamers. We were cleaning the engines then. There was a shortage of manual labour, the men being away, so we was out in next to no time, firing these engines at sixteen, sixteen-and-a-half years old. Ruddy great... it was no good playing about. You had to do the procedures, what the fireman had to do. You was taught how to do that. You had to clean the fire. You got a six foot fire there. You've got to clean it out. It's red hot, clinkers and everything. You'd bring this big lump of clinker out on the end of the shovel - you're only sixteen - and you throw it out through the gap there on the engine. You've only got a bit of cloth there. Everything is red hot. I saw this boy, same age as me, he came from Tilbury, and as he threw the clinker, he's caught the end of

the shovel and it bounced right back on his hand. He was taken over to Plaistow Hospital General. This is what the kids of the day had to do, at sixteen years old.

Ron Kendrick

The medical superintendent said, "Ladies and Gentlemen, today we invaded Normandy. Will you go back to your wards, and get ready for patients please." It was very strange to me to find that they arrived in our hospital, which was some way from the coast, and they were all still in their wet uniforms. I didn't think, really. I somehow thought somebody would look after them and dry them before they got to us. But they were still wet where they had been picked off the beaches. I know one thing - we didn't nurse the Americans and the British too close together. We put the British one end of the ward and the Americans at the other. They didn't get on very well.

Joan Piper

I went back to work when my eldest one was about two, two and a half, and I had him in a nursery. They had things to play with, and they had a paddling pool. He was quite happy there, I think. And many a time I got off the bus and went into a shelter on the way to work - with him! - and then I've gone back when the all-clear went, got to work 10 or 11 o'clock. I was working in a uniform factory. That was in Tooley Street, near London Bridge.

Florence Spike

There was a feeling that you were all in it together, wherever you were. I worked in a factory close by a railway and that factory was bombed the same week as we were bombed out of our home. So I was without a job, without a home, and that went on for about six weeks until we found somewhere to live. I was working for a leather firm - we were nearly all in the leather industry around here.

We were making Sam Brown Belts, and leather cases that the electricians used to keep their gear in. They found another place down by the wharves, and moved in there; very temporarily, because we were burnt out there shortly afterwards. And then off we went to Highbury on a short lease. From Highbury, we were moved to Chalk Farm, to a part of the Chappell's piano factory - they weren't making pianos anymore, so we had space. You know, we were a bit like nomads. But having to get yourself to Chalk Farm from Bermondsey in war time was no joke.

Lil Patrick

I taught in London. We had one class in the morning and one class in the afternoon. Then in the September when the blitz started we were transferred to rest centre work and I was in a big school off the Old Kent Road. We did 24 hours on, 24 hours off, 120 hours a fortnight, in two teams. I must say we got wonderful co-operation from the people that were being bombed out. You get good community spirit when something like that happens. But it was a very bad area. I don't think a night went by without some trouble in the area.

Elsie Blenkey

My parents wouldn't let us join the services - my father especially, so I volunteered for the Land Army. I went as a driver. I hadn't driven before except I'd had a go in my father's car, but not really on the roads.

Well, I remember feeling quite chuffed, really, in the first uniform I was given, because that was corduroy breeches, and a sort of cowboy hat! And when I arrived at the training centre, everybody laughed at me - they said, "You won't last long like that! That's not your working gear!" They were quite right, and it was dungarees from then on.

We used to work ninety hours a week. You moved around to different farms. We were sort of contract workers, I think they'd call them today - contract gangs. And we used to move all around the farms in Buckinghamshire, and on the borders of Bedfordshire. I used to drive this van, I was chauffeur and forewoman. I got seventeen shillings a week but out of that we had to pay our lodgings.

Apart from driving the tractor, I did ploughing, harvesting, hay-making, potato picking with a spinner - that's the worst job out of the lot, because you spun them out of the ground, but then you had to pick them up, and that was on all fours, so by the time you got to the end of the row... that was horrible work.

Ivy Maylan



Ivy Maylan and fellow Land Army girls.

IN UNIFORM

We had to go in one at a time and be interviewed. It came my turn, and he said, "What would you like to do? Why do you want to join the Air Force?" I said, "Well I've always wanted to join the Air Force." And then he said, "Well, what do you want to do?" I said, "Well, to tell you the truth, I want to do something for the war, but I never want to kill anyone!" So he said, "Well, cook!" so I said, "You've never tasted my cooking!" I'm 18 and a half, 19, remember and I'm talking to this man with all this gold braid on him, and he says, "Well, general duties." I said, "What does that entail?" He said, "Well, sweeping and" Well I said, "No, that's not what I want. I want something exciting!" and behind him on the wall, there was this beautiful, magnificent motorboat jumping out of the sea, and it was an RAF rescue launch, and I said, "Actually, that's what I wanted to do, I've always wanted to do that." So he said, "Well, that's very difficult. It's a very, very small unit, and there's only a few scattered here and there these boats, it's not like big aerodromes of them, you just live in a house and put the boats out and put them to sea." So I said, "That's what I really want to do." "Well, you seem very keen," he said, "but I must tell you that in this section, the marine section, are these sons of millionaires who've been brought up on yachts all their life and know everything about it, all these young fellas, or stevedores off the River Thames, the bargees who have served five years apprenticeship and can handle boats." He said, "I can see you are eager, so couldn't you just tell me, are you in any-way loosely connected with the sea? Just loosely, you know, I'm just trying to help you, just loosely!" So I said, "Yes I am." He said, "How's that then?" I said, "Well my dad's got a fish and chip shop!" So he took his cap off and mopped his forehead, and looked at the officer

next to him, and he said, "What do you think?" And this other officer said to him, "He sounds like ideal material to me!" So that's how I joined the Air Force - the Air Sea Rescue. And it was really marvellous, you know, four and a half years I was on the sea, exciting action all the time.

Joe Scala

I was in the mixed heavy attack battery in the WRACs. I used to be what they used to call a height-finder - that was finding the height and distance of the target. But you couldn't stay on the doodle-bug, because it was going too fast. But if they did plod, yes you'd fire at them, but I can't say that I ever remember our battery hitting the target. I think it was the aircraft that got them.

Our discipline was very strong. If you got the evening off, and you went out to the pub, if you came back at one minute past twelve, you were on a charge. And also, they were very strict about the men keeping to their huts, and us keeping over the other side of the road in our huts. But you wouldn't do anything outrageous, because you were too afraid. I was put on a charge once; I didn't get back in time. Instead of being in at one minute to twelve, I was in at quarter past twelve, I think. I think I'd been home because my mum had got blasted out, and the trains were all up the wall, so I didn't get back to camp till quarter past. But I lost three days' pay for that quarter of an hour - which was a lot of money when you were only getting seven shillings a week. So that made you make sure you got in on time. We accepted it. It was all accepted. You took orders, you did as you were told, and if you were put on a charge, you'd done something wrong and you accepted it.

Mary Gibson

I've got cuttings from the newspaper at that time where the British government have asked the people from the colonies to volunteer. Try and remember that Britain was at war and Britain could not have beat the Germans on their own.

I remember arriving at Greenock from Jamaica. It was a cold November and it was snowing and all that. It was dirty grey. The Salvation Army came on the troop ship train and gave you a cup of tea and a bun. There were not that many people about but the people that you did see welcomed you because they was at war and you came to help. When I eventually got to the camp, we were all welcomed in the community because we were needed.

Sam King



I was in the concert party in the Air Force. We was in a little squad on our own and we used to go and entertain wherever they wanted us. And guard duty and all that. What I did towards the war was.....nil!

Leonard Whitlock

I can remember hearing the bombs, D-Day, you know when they went over there, and I remember the soldiers crying. They didn't want to go, I can remember that.

They said so, well they knew they were going overseas but they didn't know anything about D-Day, and they were doing assault courses you know, and some of them couldn't swim.

Eleanor Ala



*Above: Denis Quinlan age 4 in 1941.
This uniform was purchased from Whitehall
clothiers, Walworth Road.*

*Left: Sam King as a RAF Corporal then stationed
at RAF Sealand near Chester.*